

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR GENERAL RICK LYNCH, USA,  
COMMANDING GENERAL, MULTINATIONAL DIVISION-CENTER, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ  
TOPIC: OPERATION MARNE HUSKY TIME: 9:30 A.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, AUGUST 16, 2007

-----  
Copyright (c) 2007 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue,  
NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not  
affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be  
copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News  
Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work  
prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that  
person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet  
Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202)347-1400  
-----

(Note: Please refer to [www.defendamerica.mil](http://www.defendamerica.mil) for more information.)

GEN. LYNCH: This is General Lynch.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER BROOK DEWALT, USN (Office of the Secretary of  
Defense for Public Affairs): Hello, General Lynch. This is Lieutenant  
Commander Brook DeWalt. I'm the moderator for today. And we've got online with  
us a handful of great blogger folks, and if it's all right with you, I'll go  
ahead and begin this.

GEN. LYNCH: Okay.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the  
Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, August 16th, 2007. My  
name is Lieutenant Commander Brook DeWalt, with the Office of the Secretary  
of Defense of Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating our call today.

A note to our bloggers on the line today: please remember to clearly  
state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question. Respect  
the general's time, keeping your questions succinct and to the point, as we are  
limited in time today.

Today our guest from Iraq is U.S. Army Major General Rick Lynch,  
commander of Multinational Division-Center and the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry  
Division. The general is here today to discuss a variety of interesting topics  
related to current operations. And General, we're pleased to have you as a  
guest today.

Sir, do you have any opening comments?

GEN. LYNCH: It's my pleasure.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Any opening comments you have today?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah. Okay. We got a slight delay here in the phone  
line, so I hope you can hear me okay. Can you hear me?

Q Yes.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Yes, just fine.

GEN. LYNCH: Okay. Great.

As the moderator said, I'm Rick Lynch. I'm in command of Multinational Division-Center and the 3rd Infantry Division. And essentially my battlespace is the southern belts of Baghdad -- so we've got the Mahmudiyah qadha and the Madain qadha, essentially the southern and the southeastern portions of Baghdad -- and then four of the southern provinces: Babil, Wasat, Karbala and Najaf.

I've been here now for six months with Multinational Division- Center. Before that I was here with General Casey as his deputy for Strategic Effects. So I worked the political, military, academic and the communications line for General Casey, and I was the spokesman for the force. So I went away for 10 months and then came back with the 3rd Infantry Division to assume command of Multinational Division- Center.

And when I came in, we came in as part of the surge. We thought we were going come back in June and go north, and we end up back in March and looking south. And many of my brigades came in with me as part of the surge.

And the job they gave us was clear, you know, block the accelerants of violence into Baghdad, secure the population and defeat sectarian violence. And we've been conducting continued operations since we established ourselves on the 4th of April; major operations started with the surge units on the 15th of June, and you've seen many of those played up in the media. And they're all Marne operations, so we did Marne Torch, followed by Marne Avalanche. And just yesterday we started another major operation called Marne Husky. And they're all focused on enemy sanctuaries. What's happened is over time, in the absence of competent security forces in particular areas, the enemy has established sanctuaries, places where he can store munitions, conduct trainings, build bombs, and then carry all those bad things into Baghdad. So that's what our mission's been, is to disrupt that capability of the enemy and those sanctuaries.

Now, in the 10 months that I was gone, things changed. When I came back, the things that to me that are most notable -- the first one is our strategy and the way we're doing business. When I was here before, you know, we occupied large forward operating bases, and we went out, did missions and then returned to our forward operating bases; that's all changed. Now we no longer commute to work; you know, we live out with the population.

So in my area, we have 29 patrol bases, and those patrol bases are occupied by companies or by battalions, depending on the patrol base, and we're out there with the population. And that gives them a sense of security, and it allows them to be part of the solution as opposed to part of the problem. What was happening before was we'd come out, conduct operations and leave; the enemy's got this phenomenal ability to fill a void, and if you're away from an area for about 48 hours, he will immediately fill that area up. So you have to stay out there amongst them, so that's what we're doing. We're no longer commuting to work.

And the second thing is the major capabilities the surge unit's brought for us by able to use the forces to deny the enemy the sanctuaries. Now, we've had good effect. We've killed or captured over 500 of the enemy in those defined sanctuaries that we've talked about using a combat aviation brigade and our ground brigades, our artillery units to take the fight to the enemy, and we do believe that the enemy is on the run, not just in my battlespace, but across Iraq.

So the operations we have going on now are all intended to keep him on the run, not let him have a chance to breathe or rest or recoup, but continue to take the fight to the enemy.

There's a million things I can talk you through, but I've found in the past the best thing for me to do is pause with that and see what's on your mind.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: General, thank you very, very much. We'll go ahead and roll into our blogger Q&A. And we're going to take them in the order in which folks have been calling in. First we'll begin with Andrew Lubin.

Q General, good afternoon. This is Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ON Point. Sir, when I was over in --

GEN. LYNCH: Hi.

Q Hi. Sir, when I was over in Mahmudiyah in the southern belt, Colonel Kirschel (sp) and also Lieutenant Colonel Morshauser (sp) were telling me that JAM was coming out of Sadr City, basically changed the population in the south from 80/20 Sunni over Shi'a to 80/20 or so Shi'a over Sunni. Is that still going on? Is the effect of the surge pushing them south, which is then depopulating the belts?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah. I mean, you're exactly right. What Kirschel (sp) and Morshauser (sp) told you in the past is still happening. There's a migration of extremists. You know, we're dealing with three populations of Baghdadis here -- Sunni extremists, Shi'a extremists, and those with Iranian influence. And you're right, we saw and still see Shi'a militias moving south out of Sadr City working their way toward Karbala or Najaf, some of them set in Mahmudiyah, Iskandariyah.

We're at the point now, candidly, where about 46 percent of the attacks on my soldiers we believe are coming from the Shi'a extremists. We're focused on the Sunni extremists. We believe that al Qaeda is public enemy number one, but I got to tell you, we're turning our sights on the Shi'a extremists as well because they're doing all sorts of harmful things here in Iraq.

Q Can I follow up, guys? Do we have time? General, do you see the Sunni extremists slowly jumping on board with the rest of the Sunnis like they did in Anbar? GEN. LYNCH: Oh, yeah, I got to tell you, Andrew, you know, one of the thing that's caught us all by surprise, and it's happened over the last six weeks, is there's been this groundswell of enthusiasm on the part of the Sunni population primarily to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. We call them concerned citizens. And I've got about 7,000 concerned citizens in my area. These are individuals who said, "Hey, we've had enough of the violence, we've had enough of the intimidation by al Qaeda, we're not going to put up with this anymore." They came forward and said, "Let us help secure our villages." And we're doing that.

We didn't arm them. They've all got ammunition and weapons anyway. All we did is give them recognition. We identified them by VS-17 panels, orange panels, and road guard vests, and they're blocking entrance to their villages, securing their villages and taking the fight to al Qaeda.

So there has been indeed this group of Sunnis, and you could argue that some of them probably were insurgents in the past, but now they're a part

of the solution here. And we're seeing some of that in the Shi'a communities as well. You know, down in Iskandariyah and just north of Iskandariyah, there are Shi'a concerned citizens coming forward and saying, let's secure this place. We've said all along that the only people going to win this counterinsurgency fight in Iraq are the people of Iraq, and I'm starting to see that.

Q Great -- thank you very much.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: And next if we can go to Grim with Black Five.

Q Yes, this is Grim of blackfive.net.

General, I want to ask you about Operation Copperhead Road, which is targeting EFP cell operations, as you obviously know. In the past, there's been some concern that EFP technology was coming out of Iran. Without going into anything that's on the classified side, can you give us a sense of whether your operation, first, is being successful, and secondly if it's turning up evidence of Iranian involvement?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, I can -- I don't know about Copperhead Road but I have had 42 attacks in my battlespace that are EFP attacks. I'm coming across munitions in my battlespace and weapons caches that are clearly marked as Iranian munitions. I've got a large forward operating base east of Baghdad; I've got an entire brigade combat team there -- headquarters and subordinate unit.

We had 50 rockets lined up against that forward operating base. A great young soldier operating one of our unmanned aerial vehicles saw these rockets. We vectored ground forces out there, and ground forces disconnected all the firing mechanisms and rockets, but every one of those rockets came out of Iran. So we do indeed have marked Iranian influence in our area -- EFPs, munitions and also training -- you know, marked ideas of extremists from our area going into Iran, conducting training and coming back.

So what's happening in my area, because I now have Wasat Province as well, which has about a 200-kilometer stretch of the Iranian border, is we're beefing up our coalition forces out in Wasat Province or establishing international checkpoints that will block the flow from Iran into Iraq. We're going to search every truck. We're going to make sure every truck is clear and doesn't have Iranian rockets or munitions on it that are designed to attack us or the people of Iraq. Q Thank you, General.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: And next, Bruce McQuain.

Q Good afternoon, General. Bruce McQuain with qando.net.

Since you're no longer commuting to work, can you give us a sense of the amount and quality of intel you're now getting that's helping you do your job there?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, great question -- you know, we say intelligence drives everything. You know, for a period of time, we were relying on sophisticated intelligence. We were relying on signals intelligence; we were relying on, you know, intelligence from satellites, those kinds of things. But what wins the fight here is human intelligence.

So what we've found is now that we're out there, as we conduct these operations, for the one we just did in Arab Jabour, which is southeast of Baghdad, as we fought our way through the area, as we came to a village, the questions from the villagers was twofold.

The first question was, "Are you going to stay?" And then the second question was, if the answer to the first one was yes, "Now how can we help?" And one of the ways that they're helping us is providing us intelligence. I can't tell you the numbers of weapons caches, IEDs, bad guys that we've taken off the street based on locals saying, "Here it is."

Now, people argue and say, "Well, those folks are probably the ones who planted the IEDs yesterday." It doesn't matter. They're telling us where they are before they blow up our soldiers. So we have exponentially increased our intelligence from local sources since we started this concerned citizen program and lived out there amongst them.

Q Thank you.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Great. And next, Austin Bay?

Q Well, sir, the question I had, I was going to ask what -- about the increase and improvement of the quantity and quality of intelligence, and you already addressed that, but here's what -- how I'd -- I'd like to push that question a little bit further. Maybe you've already addressed it, but what does that indicate to you in terms of the governmental and political line of operation? Does the increase in intelligence -- I mean, is it a no-brainer to say that that's -- that has -- is a political indicator?

And a second question I'd ask after that is, if it is a positive indicator, what is the Iraqi government or the coalition doing to build on that kind of positive response politically?

GEN. LYNCH: Okay. You know, General Petraeus has said and we all believe that the main effort here has to be the political line of operation. You know, from the time I first started either thinking about Iraq or being in Iraq, we realized there were three conditions, and those conditions are things we had to try to influence.

The first one was the level of the insurgency. As I told you, we're taking the fight to the enemy. I believe we're having a significant effect on Sunni extremists and now we're targeting the Shi'a extremists and trying to block Iranian influence.

The second one is the capability of the Iraqi security forces. I went away for 10 months, came back, and the Iraqi army in my area is markedly improved from what I saw before, but the police is either nonexistent, corrupt or incapable, and that is a problem.

But that third condition that has to be worked is the capacity of the government, and that's at the national, provincial and the local level. And I got to tell you, the government of Iraq isn't doing anything at this point in time to help us with the concerned citizen program. You know, as I told you, a majority of these concerned citizens are Sunni. They do want to be part of the solution. They don't want weapons.

They don't want money. They just want to be recognized by the government of Iraq. They want to be legitimate Iraqi security forces. And that's the struggle we're having right now, is to get the government of Iraq to recognize them. Once the government would recognize them and make these legitimate security forces, this would continue to expand.

So we deal on a day-to-day basis with the government at all levels -- at the national level, at the provincial level -- in fact, tonight I'm having dinner with two of the Iraqi army division commanders -- and continue to promote the idea of being inclusive and allowing all these folks to be legitimate members of the security forces.

But the political line is the main effort, and it's truly the long pole in the tent over here.

Q Well, then, sir, what you're telling me is that you've got this increase in intel -- and I'm using that as a(n) indicator that there's greater trust, a greater sense of security, and that's a building -- that's a political building block. But you're saying that there's a political vacuum. Is that correct?

GEN. LYNCH: That's exactly right. They'd have to take advantage of it.

Remember, we did the surge and are doing the surge to provide the Iraqi government time and space. So I believe that what's going to happen when General Petraeus reports out in September -- there will be a marked improvement in the security situation here in Iraq as a result of the surge. The issue then becomes, is the Iraqi government at the national and provincial level going to take advantage of that time and space to build capacity and focus on being Iraqi, as opposed to being Shi'a or Sunni or sectarian?

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Great. Thank you.

And is Noah Shachtman online?

Q He is.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Go right ahead.

Q Hey. General, thanks for doing this. I'm actually going to be in your AO the week after next.

You know, you talked a little bit about the switch from sort of SIGINT and satellite-based intelligence to more human intelligence. Are there other sort of changes in the technological mix that you found that have proven effective?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, you know, we're continuing to work in the counter-IED world to protect our soldiers from the most lethal weapon that the enemy has, which is IEDs. I've lost 99 soldiers since I've been the commander of the 3rd Infantry Division. We've lost 78 since the 4th of April. And the majority of those attacks and the resulting fatalities is the result of IEDs.

So we're doing all sorts of technological improvements to counter IED, most of which, you know, I can't talk about in much detail. But if there's a place for technology here, it's the counter-IED piece.

The other place for technology that we're using with good effect is the persistent surveillance, where we could have long-range surveillance, either from fixed cameras or from aerial cameras, to allow us to continue to watch the environment. And as we detect changes or motion or things that are causing concern, we can take action before our soldiers run into an IED or some kind of a(n) ambush, those kinds of things.

Q Has there been a sort of downgrading on relying on some of those technical systems? I mean, you mentioned the switch from sort of satellite-based to human-based intelligence. Are there sort of downgradings, perhaps, that have changed when you've moved from commuting to work to living at the job?

GEN. LYNCH: Now, what I've found is all the "INTs" are equally important. So we didn't downplay the use of any of the other INTs. So anything I have that I can use to gather intelligence so we can have intelligence-led operations, we're doing, so I don't want you to believe that we've stopped using all the technical-based INTs. I'm just telling you they're based on the fact we've got this relationship with the local community now where our HUMINT capability has significantly improved, and as a result of that, our operations are more effective.

Q Okay.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Noah, thank you.

Now, we've had a couple other late call-ins that I don't have your names. Any other bloggers who wish -- who want to identify themselves and ask a question?

Q Yes, this is Jarred Fishman from Air Force Pundit. Good afternoon, General. Thank you for your time. You mentioned the Iranian influence. Are we getting any support from Shi'as as far as being able to infiltrate the Qods Force, IRGC cells in order for us to be able to have a counteroffensive against them?

GEN. LYNCH: Did you say help from the Shi'a community?

Q Yes, within either, you know, the Iraqi army, police, secret police.

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah. Yeah, I got to tell you -- and that goes back to my basic sense of optimism about the people of Iraq are going to win this counterinsurgency fight. In Wasat province, you know, which is all Shi'a, which borders Iran, you know, I've got now 13 tribes -- all the major leaders of all the major tribes are ponying up to help us stop Iranian influence. I mean, so there is a group here. I mean, there is a Shi'a extremist group that relies on Iranian money and Iranian technology and Iranian training, but it's not all the Shi'a community. And I've got a large portion of Shi'a Iraqis who are helping us with intelligence to help block this Iranian influence, and I find that most encouraging.

You know, what you do after you spend multiple years in Iraq is you develop a very realistic approach to what's going on. So I don't want any of you to think that, you know, we're being Pollyannas here, because all this great stuff with concerned citizens could stop overnight if there's not a sense

from the people that the government of Iraq is going to embrace this idea, and that includes the Shi'a concerned citizens as well.

Q Great.

Q Which province, sir, is that that you had the 13 tribes in?  
Thirteen Shi'a --

GEN. LYNCH: Oh, it's Wasat province.

Q I'm sorry?

GEN. LYNCH: It's right on the Iranian border.

Q Would you say it again? I --

GEN. LYNCH: Wasat.

Q Wasat.

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: And do we have any other bloggers who have not asked any questions? Okay. And would anybody like a follow-up question? We probably have time for one more.

Q Yeah, General, this is Andrew Lubin again from U.S. Cavalry ON Point. Yeah, sir, with the GOI not stepping up at every opportunity, do you see a situation, probably sooner rather than later, where the Sunnis and the Kurds simply say enough is enough and they go their own way?

GEN. LYNCH: It's hard to predict. You know, I do believe, you know, that the Shi'a government has an opportunity here to embrace this more secure situation that we've given them and work to be a representative government. We said from the get-go that the end state here was that Iraq is at peace with its neighbors and an ally in the war on terror, that has a representative government that respects the human rights of all Iraqis, that has a security force that can maintain domestic order and deny Iraq a safe haven for terrorists.

And I'll tell you there's an opportunity now that's just palpable that this government could jump on and they could make marked improvements. But these things take time, you know. It's a matter of strategic patience.

We all wish that the government of Iraq, you know, would endorse this now and embrace this idea of being Iraqi and not being Shi'a, but they're struggling. It's going to take time. Sometimes I worry we're a nation that wants to rush to a conclusion, but successful counterinsurgency operations have averaged nine years. If you study COIN operations in the past, we're four years into this, it's going to take them a while to sort this out.

Q Okay, thank you.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: And thanks a lot to everybody.

As we wrap up today's call, I'd like to ask the general if he has any final comments.



GEN. LYNCH: Well, first off, you know, thanks for your interest. You know, this is your Army. You're fighting our war, the global war on terrorism. And you know, what concerns me more than anything else is there's this drumbeat that maybe the Army is on its knees, your Army's on its knees and at the breaking point. And there's all these people back there that are talking about, you know, the Army is stretched too thin and it's going to fall apart.

Not the Army I'm in. You know, everywhere I go, I go and reenlist soldiers. It's 130 degrees over here, they're wearing 65 pounds of body armor, but they're raising their right hand and saying, "I'm staying Army because it's important to do this." I had General Casey here this past weekend. He reenlisted 134 of my soldiers at one time. It's an amazing thing.

So I don't -- I don't want you to have concerns, regardless of what you're seeing in the media, that the Army's at the breaking point. We all worry about our families back home. I personally have been deployed four of the last six years. That's difficult on families. But I've been married 25 and I've got adult children. It's the youngsters here that are finding more -- finding they spend more time away from home than they are at home, and that's of concern.

I appreciate your time, folks. Thanks. LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Thank you, General Lynch.

Q General, thank you.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Today's program will be available online at the Bloggers Roundtable link on DOD.mil -- (inaudible) -- access stories, source documents, such as audio files, print transcripts -- (inaudible) -- news and the general's biography. If there are any questions about the program, please contact DOD New Media at 703-325- 0103.

Again, thank you, General Lynch and our blogger participants. This concludes today's event, and please feel free to disconnect at any time.

END.